

**The Society of Labour and the Common Good: Which Concept of Work; Which Lifestyles;
Which Paradigm for Development?**

By Fr. Maverick Mario Cludoff Fernandes

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years celebration of the Pontifical Encyclical Mater et Magistra is certainly a moment of grace for the Church, which incidentally comes close on the completion of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) held on 18 March 2011 in Switzerland, where people congregated to evaluate the steps taken / needed to move ahead in conserving planet earth, after the famous Rio Conference, to further reflect on Humanity and its role in the Environment. We are at an opportune time gathered here to discuss the role and contribution of the church towards establishing a paradigm of development that would be both viable and sustainable.

This paper will reflect on the world of labour/work through the prism of the Commons and examine the invasion and its processes to understand the reality of the common good. It will further deliberate briefly on the world of work and critically look at the emerging lifestyles and appreciate the need to arrive at alternate tools to address these ways of life. Finally we would suggest some tested Asian thought processes to arrive at viable and sustainable paradigms of development.

IMAGING DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS COMMON GOOD

As I have the honour to open the day's proceedings, I would like you all to journey along with me. We are familiar with images. Images not only trigger our imagination but it initiates a thought process which can lead to the fulfillment of our dreams and thereby make reality present. Let me offer you an image before I proceed to discuss further. The **concept of Commons** is an image that can assist our reflection which I would like to share a little more.

Traditionally, the commons is defined as the elements of the environment - forests, atmosphere, rivers, fisheries or grazing land - that are shared, used and enjoyed by all. It is a terminology that refers to resources that are collectively owned ^[1] or shared between or among populations. These resources can include everything from natural resources to common land and even software.^[2] The commons contains public and private property, over which people have certain traditional rights.

Today, the commons are also understood within the cultural sphere which includes literature, music, arts, design, film, video, television, radio, information, and sites of heritage. The commons can also include public space, public education, health and the infrastructure that allows our society to function (such as electricity or water delivery systems).

Some aspects that describe the commons; first, it is not commodified, if they are done then they cease to be commons; second, its nature is to share ownership as widely, rather than as narrowly, as possible, it is inclusive rather than exclusive; third, the assets are meant to be preserved regardless of their return of capital. Since we received them as shared gifts, we have an obligation to pass them on to future generations in at least the same condition as we received them. If we can add to their value, so much the better, but at a minimum we must not degrade them, and we certainly have no right to destroy them. ^[3] Peter Barnes describes the Commons as having two characteristics: they are all gifts and they are all shared. These shared gifts are received as members of a community. ^[4]

Some of these gifts are tangible, while others are more abstract, political, and cultural. The tangible assets of the commons include the vast quantities of oil, minerals, timber, grasslands, mines and other natural resources on public lands, as well as the broadcast airwaves and such public facilities as civic institutions. The government is the trustee and steward of such resources, but "the people" are the real owners.^[5] The foundation of the principle of universal destination of the earth's goods has it that God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members.^[6] However a market-based perspective also shows relatively little interest in "externalities" (pollution, social disruptions, costs borne by future generations), and it discounts the power of "exogenous" variables such as moral and social norms. The commons comprise not just marketable assets, but social institutions and cultural traditions that help define our common life.^[7] Intangible context is generally ignored.

These resources, in many cases, have no officially recognized value, let alone the legal definition and protection. But commoners realize all too well that community structures and social relationships are vitally important in creating wealth, not to mention a humane society.^[8] A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good—the good of all people and of the whole person — as its primary goal. The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself.^[9]

Having deliberated on the image and the importance of commons, we need to view the various ways of invasion on the commons that has taken shape.

Invasion of the Commons

There is a serious invasion on the commons which is reflected in the form of modern day enclosures. These enclosures cover a wide gamut of our life. This can be seen in the alteration of the local market areas into shopping malls and in the consolidation of local organic agriculture into national food-processing enterprises. Neo modern enclosures occur when government-managed resources are 'gifted' to private interests and when corporations superimpose market regimes on robust social communities.

Content industries, like the Internet, are driven to function as pay-per-use vending machines. Companies disrupt the openness and collegiality within scientific disciplines by privatizing research and imposing non-disclosure agreements, these are some examples of how modern day enclosure is practiced.^[10] It may significantly be noted here that Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute and untouchable. Private property is in its essence only an instrument for respecting the principle of the universal destination of goods, in the final analysis; therefore, it is not an end but a means.^[11]

Let me state a few distinct enclosed domains: enclosing the airwaves, privatizing public knowledge, branding children's vulnerability and 'running over' the tourist taxi industry.

Enclosing the airwaves: Broadcasting is an essential vehicle for social communication. The commons of the broadcast spectrum was originally so plentiful. Now the government grants radio licenses to anyone upon request^[12] The loss of the airwaves to market enclosure substantially expanded the role of commercial value. This enclosure could be counted as one of the great civic losses.

Privatizing public knowledge: Media consolidation is a way by which companies are enclosing the information commons. With a handful of companies jockeying to gain control over access to the Internet via cable broadband services, the Internet itself may remain a commons while access to it could be controlled by oligopolies. Internet began as a government sponsored project which developed and flourished and now private control of the Internet infrastructure is a threat to the information commons.^[13]

Intellectual property rights, copyright laws, patent laws, etc are measures to confine "public knowledge" that has long been open and accessible to everyone.^[14] Incidentally, public science

paid the bills for the breakthroughs in the development of drugs to treat cancer, HIV-AIDS, genetic disorders, depression, and diabetes while private players are allowed to rush in and acquire patent monopolies that raise prices, stifle competition, and inhibit future research. ^[15]

Branding the vulnerability of children: Gary Ruskin, director of an advocacy group that fights an array of commercial excesses argues that there's been a shift in the way our society thinks of children. Marketers discovered that children were the most under-exploited segment in the market so they developed ingenious ways to persuade little young minds to learn to buy mindlessly. ^[16] In the business culture, children are viewed as an economic resource to be exploited, just like bauxite or timber. ^[17]

Mike Searles, the president of Kids-R-Us suggests that companies are thinking that if they can own a child early in life, then they would own the child for longer years. Thus earlier businesses were contented by owning market shares however today the race is on to own the mind share, that is, the personal attitudes and loyalties of children. For example, McDonald's produces children's entertainment videos as '*Mac and Me*' and *McTreasure Island*, etc. ^[18]

Tourist Taxi Services: When the State Government decided to promote mass tourism in early eighties in the State of Goa, India, the operation of transport services to guide the visitors was left solely for the local community. In the course of time, the entry of private conglomerates was facilitated and they began to not only organise international organised tours but also usurped the market of the local taxi drivers and owners by arranging for their local guided tours in buses. This invasion of the commons has created tensions and has disrupted a just manner of operations. ^[19]

Process of Invasion through Value Creation

We reflected on the severe invasion of the commons in the form of enclosures. It is obvious that the Commons were the patrimony of the people, until 'Value was added' to it. Value creation is a scientific process through which the forces driving the markets have invaded the commons. We need to succinctly understand what is meant by value creation and the manner in which it has worked itself through to invade the commons.

Creating value means earning a return on capital that exceeds the cost of capital over time. At the operating level, value is created by selling a product or service to a customer for a price that more than covers all of the costs, including the cost of capital, to support that customer relationship. ^[20] But some analysts insist on a broader definition of "value creation" that can be considered separate from traditional financial measures.

In fact, besides the financial measures, there are intangible factors that drive value creation. Some of these intangibles include technology, innovation, intellectual property, alliances, management capabilities, employee relations, customer relations, community relations, and brand value that are measured and accounted for to quantify the added value by organisations. These are some of the critical sources of value that are utilised by companies to improve their competitive advantage. Kaplan and Norton concur that the link between these intangible assets and value creation is a corporate strategy. ^[21]

The value creation index is a tool designed to quantify the link between an organization's non-financial performance and its valuation in the market. However, there is no accounting system that capsulate all the hidden values--brand, human capital, partnerships, intellectual property--embedded within the total market valuation of a company. ^[22]

One of the important components of value creation is the introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT). The term 'value addition' implies the increase in value of goods and services at each stage of production or transfer of goods and services. VAT is a tax on the final consumption of goods or services and is ultimately borne by the consumer ^[23].

This same exercise of value creation has been transferred to the assets of the commons and hence the over enthusiasm to privatize and monopolise. The intangibles in the commons have captured the

mind space to the extent that even the people have turned blind towards the accumulation by dispossession that is prevalent in the society.

Accumulation by dispossession is guided mainly by four practices namely, privatization, financialization, management and manipulation.^[24] As a result, there are wide acquisitions of land and of everything that belongs to the commons for various purposes. Policies are formulated to favour those who are better placed and have the power and money to influence the laws. Experimental policies are camouflaged by changing the name of the game in order to grab the commons. In one federal state in India, first, they announced a master plan for development, then a free port to generate revenue, followed by special economic zones, then tourism zones and today the commons are attacked by the most liked term eco-zones. These policies are always portrayed as benefitting the common people by enticing them with the promises of employment, job creation and infrastructure development.

Value creation springs from neo-liberal modernity, in which dispossession plays a large role, and where the capital class is gaining power at the expense of the labour class.

THE WORLD OF WORK AS COMMONS

The purpose of labour is common good. It is always for the benefit of the other, no doubt the person concerned gets the value of the work in terms of reward or remuneration but it always contributes for the betterment of the society. The society is enriched due to the hard efforts of individuals, through their business or service work enhances the quality of life. It also has positive value in terms of energizing the human person to discover, innovate and invent. Gaudium et Spes clearly states that "the human person is the author, the subject and purpose of human work. Work was made for the person and not the person as a slave of work. By work a person becomes associated with a redemptive work of Jesus Christ who was himself a worker."^[25] Labour, thus, transforms persons.

We are discussing labour in the context of belonging to the realm of commons, that is, as belonging to the community. The effect today however is directed by few players who manage and control the world of work which has led to the worker losing his / her value.

Today labour has turned to be a product of value creation. Only labour that creates value is valuable. And it is the market that decides this value. The value of labour is determined in terms of how much the labourer is able to contribute to the overall growth of the organisation. This has led to the commodification of the labour and the labourer.

At this point we can ask what is the commons in labour? The answer lies in the fact that we need to recognise that labour exists beyond the confines of market space. But unfortunately that space is enclosed by the practices that have alienated and degraded the value of labour. Markets however, have imprisoned work and thus destroyed the real value of labour.

The first concern is that work must be regarded not merely as a commodity, but as a specifically human activity. In the majority of cases a man's work is his sole means of livelihood. Its remuneration, therefore, cannot be made to depend on the state of the market. It must be determined by the laws of justice and equity. Any other procedure would be a clear violation of justice.^[26] Thus the commons in labour is destroyed by the markets forces and the hence there has to be a change. Furthermore, labor and capital are both meant to work together, not for economics alone but to serve the common good of the person and the community.^[27]

The invasion of the world of labour has fashioned different lifestyles which are promoted by the invasion of the world of work. Let us view some of these lifestyles:

LIFESTYLES PROMOTED BY THE INVASION

The crux of this invasion are the values that are developed in the process. The invasion has led to a new way of functioning which is reflected in the manner in which we relate to one another and lifestyles that are promoted to sustain this invasion.

Corporate Social Responsibility: A New Label: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not an old concept. It is only a new label (a distorted one) for what was prevalent, that is, genuine philanthropy.

In CSR companies engage with the community to introduce some of its contribution towards the development of the area. A firm may decide to invest in human resource management, environmental protection, health and safety, community involvement, etc to develop their CSR attributes. In the pursuit of CSR, various factors and parameters are viewed to calculate the anticipated costs and benefits, particularly given the fact that it frequently involves subtle and less proven spheres.

Maria Sillanpaa, founding director of the Sustainability Advisory Group contends that “CSR in many instances is moving from ad hoc activities driven by individual company founders, to a strategically aligned, competency-based activity framed by the company’s overall corporate responsibility strategy”.^[28] It is proposed that a rigorous and systematic approach to CSR investment is likely to yield the most positive results for both the business and society.

In the final analysis, CSR is viewed by businesses as a form of investment that helps to differentiate a company and its goods and services. In it, CSR has introduced a different lifestyle, a tainted form of philanthropy, which actually is a business strategy with an eye on further investments.

Invading Tribal Knowledge: The knowledge of the indigenous people is based on a profound conceptualization of their ancestral patrimony. They rely on their skills for survival which are ingrained in their long associations with their area. The indigenous people codified their knowledge in their lifestyle. They are clear about their sustainable agricultural practices and also know how to attend to their medical needs. This knowledge is largely present in oral form and is passed on through imitation and oral tradition.

In the present day, there are clear attempts to capture these knowledge systems into a written form and these endeavours are not free from the burden of intellectual piracy. Knowledge has become a commodity. Multinationals are funding research and claim exclusive ownership which is then traded for economic gains. The genetic change that is achieved by the farmers over the millennia is not recognized but those innovated in modern laboratories qualify for patent rights.

The scope of market operations has expanded. Anything that can be digitized can be traded across all national boundaries.^[29] Such a manner of functioning has isolated the indigenous people and made them easy victims that can be preyed upon by unprincipled pirates of knowledge. Knowledge has an ethical imperative, as it is not insulated from its socio-political and economic context and as such is determined and conditioned by oppressive forces.

Trading with knowledge is another lifestyle that has crept in as a consequence of the invasion of the commons which has unfortunately led even many of the indigenous people to abandon their knowledge systems under the influence of modernization.

Enclaved Travel and Leisure: The form of travel for leisure has gained another exploitative turn. The promotion of tourism has assumed a new form wherein group of visitors from a certain country choose a place for holiday and create another village/country of their own in the destination state. This process is called Enclave Tourism.

The cultural attitudes specific to both these groups of visitors also bring about many cultural, political, economic, social and environmental consequences on the host community. One can also notice many unbecoming activities like flesh trade, drug abuse, rave parties and crimes like rapes, murder etc. The motivation, expectations, travel patterns, and activities of these visitors have little to offer to the local communities which results in a substantial displacement of the locals. The displacement has reached levels where signboards are displayed in some of the 'tourist managed restaurants' that 'locals not allowed'. This has caused a loss of control of the locals over tourism activities in their localities ^[30] The global players have thrown their weight around and the local participation is reduced to bear minimum and are left to feed on the bread crumbs that fall from the banquet table of tourism.

Such enclaves are promoted by the strong outside forces which have made the locals alien in their own backyard. Thus this lifestyle of enclaved tourism is yet another form of invasion of the commons.

Gated Communities Promoted: Another phenomenon that is in vogue today is the promotion of gated communities. A gated community is a residential area with controlled access, used to protect the privacy and safety of residents. An unnecessary value is created to an area of land with the advertisement of the scenic environment (obviously not the creation of the land promoter) to lure the rich and the wealthy. Gated communities are generally very costly areas, and may offer special facilities to residents as a means of creating a community feeling.

Such communities are meant for a specific demographic planned retirement or to protect famous or infamous residents, government personnel, celebrities or visiting dignitaries. They are provided additional security and medical services. The controlled access in a gated community can be as simple as an actual gate to which residents possess a key or a security kiosk complete with armed guards that require authorization before allowing anyone into the complex. ^[31]

These may be created often among the local residents where the space is cordoned off from using the access which was part of people's daily life. These lifestyles have created villages within villages or towns within towns thereby alienating local people from their own areas.

ALTERNATE VALUE CREATION

Having discussed some lifestyles that have led to the invasion of the commons we need to think of alternate values to withstand this way of life in order to arrive at a form of development that sustains.

We could arrive at a consensus to discuss the alternate values. It needs to be a two pronged effort in the form of an intellectual pursuit and an action oriented process.

The intellectual pursuit could be promoted by having a broad based organisation that promotes comprehensive scientific studies of labour, common good and related matters, provides a forum for free exchange of views on various aspects of the related matters among all people, and disseminates the information and knowledge for a wider debate. ^[32]

For the action oriented process, we will need to work towards building a democratic and just society through economic development and equitable sharing of the gains of development. The democratic rights of the workers and the commons will need to be restored in the sites of production and governance. An international solidarity based on mutual respect and equality by democratizing global economies and political regimes and by engaging in collaboration and coalition building with a focus on the common good. In this action oriented model, there is need for a change in the paradigm of governance from an expert/ official model of governance to a paradigm of engagement. Also the decentralization of governance enables to overcome shortcomings of highly centralized institutional structures since they have a greater stake at being responsive to local priorities and needs. In other words, it is not for leaders to govern the people, but for the people to let the leaders govern them ^[33]. The common good is the end that gives meaning to progress and to development, which otherwise would be limited to the sole production of material goods. Progress and

development are necessary, but if they are not oriented to the common good, they lead to the negative consequences of the prevalence of consumerism, waste, poverty and excess. ^[34]

PARADIGMS OF DEVELOPMENT

The alternate value creation ought to be the basis for the discussion on the models of development. Having the need in mind in this section, some models are proposed which are not only sustainable but economically viable but more so demands a change in lifestyles that would create a better a society. These are some Asian thought processes for reflection to arrive at sustainable paradigms of development.

Development as Freedom: Amartya Sen critically explores the relationship between freedom and development to posit that growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rising personal incomes, industrialization, technological advance, or social modernization does not imply development. He propounds that freedom is a basic constituent of development and an enabling key to other aspects. In other words, freedom is the primary end and the principal means of development. He supports his argument by stating that famines tend to occur in one-party governments and military dictatorships and colonies ruled from elsewhere; it has never happened in a democracy.

Sen attempts to expand the basic interpretations of freedom by examining five elemental forms of instrumental freedoms: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Each form of freedom is complementary to the other, remaining interrelated and inextricable. These freedoms constitute not only the means, but also the ends in development. ^[35]

In "*Caritas in Veritate*," Pope Benedict XVI confirms that the notion of integral human development presupposes precise principles, such as subsidiarity and solidarity, as well as the interdependence between state, society and market. In a global society, made up of many peoples and various religions, the common good and integral development is obtained with the contribution of all. ^[36]

Thus we have a model for human development which not only addresses the amelioration of material deprivations, but one that gives a road map to bring about spiritual and moral development.

Happiness Quotient - Bhutan philosophy: The farsighted rulers of Bhutan articulated a concept of the Index of Happiness in 1979 in preparation for the non-aligned summit. The Index of Happiness has seven parameters which determine the happiness quotient of the Himalayan Kingdom. The development is measured not by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but by an index of the Gross National Happiness (GNH). The GNH forms the basis of Bhutan's five year planning process. It believes that it is the responsibility of the State to create a happy environment based on four pillars: sustainable development, preservation of culture, conservation of environment, and good governance. The GNH pursues neither military nor economic might as a national objective that serves to safeguard Bhutan's identity, culture and sovereignty. ^[37]

They do not believe that time is money and their lifestyle confirms that happiness is not just rushing to make the next quick buck but comes also from spending time with each other in the family and community. In their scheme of things, material prosperity is not the end all of existence.

It is imperative to find out from such lifestyles and discover more about how they are able to grow despite the pressures of advertising that may lure them. It is not that Bhutan does not encounter the challenges that are emerging from the course of globalisation. We need to discover the Bhutanese way of development which is derived from factors other than wealth creation or accumulation. They are teaching us that simplicity preserves the environment and promotes genuine development.

Pope Paul VI had affirmed that “Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person... What we hold important is the person, each person and each group of persons and we even include the whole of humanity.”^[38]

Tribal model – land life symbiosis: There is a land life symbiosis that exists among the tribals. The jan (people) jangal (forest) and zanvar (animals) and zamin (land) are integral to their existence. It needs to be positively asserted that any interference to all that is basic to the life of the tribal may create untold misery to their existence. The close symbiosis that is prevalent with their natural resources like plants, animals, water, forest and land contributes to their survival.

Pope Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate* asserts that “the Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction.”^[39]

In this context, it is of importance to recognize the demand for Community Intellectual Property Rights (CIPRs) as against the Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) which is a way of restoring the commons and working towards a more sustainable development.

Through continuous vigilance the exploitative forces have to be fought against to maintain the equilibrium of the nature along with those born to preserve the land life symbiosis.

Vasudeva Kuttumbakam: Globalisation considers the world as “one village” and development promoted through its process has led to a unification of economic, technological, social, cultural and political forces but always driven by business interests. Although globalisation aims at diluting and dissolving the political boundaries of nations, nationalities, cultures and diversities, the world today is witnessing strife, wars, and conflicts on all fronts!

Amidst such a reality, we reflect on “Vasudaiva Kutumbakam”, a Vedic understanding of the “world is one family”. ‘Vasudaiva Kutumbakam’ is ingrained in the way of life of Vedic people and encompasses the whole humanity. It did not have place for exploitation of natural resources, in fact animals and plants and even rivers and mountains were venerated. ‘Vasudaiva Kutumbakam’ that was ingrained in the culture and way of life of the people on the Indian subcontinent. The lifestyle reflected concern for ‘universal welfare’ and their encounters with alternate beliefs, faiths and even civilizations reflected tolerance and pluralism.^[40]

Indeed, “the genuine development of peoples depends on this important recognition: that the human race is a single family working together in true communion for its common good. And the Church has consistently proclaimed and defended this universal value of unity of humankind throughout her history.”^[41] Thus the present day drivers of progress can take cue from this knowledge of thousands of years and work genuinely towards making the world one family.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude using the argument put forth by the participants, at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) held on 18 March 2011 in Switzerland, that “the world’s current economic model cannot lead to sustainable development, but the resources do exist for the world to develop sustainably and for society to be transformed; and eradicating poverty and creating sustainable livelihoods are key to achieving sustainable development”.

The world of work and the implied lifestyles are passing through the stages where an alternate value creation has to be formulated to protect the commons and guide future development. The

sustainable paradigms which ought to be explored are all around us. A deeper reflection of the proposed models can further enable to collectively reign in a constructive development paradigm.

End notes:

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25. Church in the Modern World, cf. No. 67
26. Pontifical Encyclical of John XXIII Mater et Magistra, (cf). No. 18
27. JOHN PAUL II, Laborem Exercens, cf. No. 12
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38. Development of the Peoples, cf. No.14
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